



Dominguez Canyon Wilderness Study Area

Welcome Visitors

Over the past 65 million years, Big Dominguez and Little Dominguez Creeks have carved through the sandstone of the Uncompahgre Plateau, creating the landscape we see today. The canyons and mesas created by erosion inspired the BLM to preserve this area for future generations by designating the 73,888-acre Dominguez Canyon Wilderness Study Area in 1980.

What is a Wilderness Study Area?

Only the U.S. Congress has the authority to designate Wilderness. In the Wilderness Act of 1964, Congress directed the Forest Service, National Park Service, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to set aside wilderness areas. In 1976, Congress directed the BLM to inventory lands suitable for wilderness designation. The areas BLM found that had wilderness qualities were designated as Wilderness Study Areas (WSA), including areas such as Dominguez Canyon. Until Congress makes a decision about designating Dominguez Canyon as Wilderness, or releasing it from WSA status, the BLM will manage the area to preserve its wilderness qualities. Livestock grazing is an historic use of the area, and this use is permitted to continue within a WSA or designated BLM Wilderness. Consequently, visitors may expect to see cattle at certain times of the year, and they may encounter minor livestock developments, such as fences and stock ponds.

Wilderness areas are managed to preserve their natural conditions and provide opportunities for primitive recreation. They offer sanctuary for wildlife, protect watersheds, and are living links to the past. They preserve a piece of a lost landscape and are places of great ecological, historical, scientific, geological, recreational, and spiritual value. As you visit Dominguez Canyon WSA, you can help the BLM with its responsibility to protect this area for future generations by practicing Leave No Trace skills and ethics and respecting use restrictions.

Leave No Trace Skills and Ethics



- **Plan Ahead and Prepare**
- Know the special concerns that go along with traveling through the desert. Minimize risk by planning a trip that matches your skills and expectations, and prepare for hazards and emergencies.
- Visit in small groups when possible.

- **Travel and Camp on Durable Surfaces**
- Durable surfaces include established trails and campsites, rock, gravel, dry grasses or snow.
- Protect riparian areas by camping at least 200 feet from lakes and streams.
- Good campsites are found, not made. Altering a site is not necessary.

- **Dispose of Waste Properly**
- Pack it in, pack it out. Inspect your campsite and rest areas for trash or spilled foods. Pack out all trash, leftover food, and litter (including toilet paper and hygiene products).
- Deposit solid human waste in catholes dug 6-8 inches deep, at least 200 feet from water, camp and trails. Cover and disguise the cathole when finished.

- **Leave What You Find**
- Prehistoric and historic sites help us understand our past (collection of artifacts and fossils is against the law).
- Please leave rocks, plants and other natural objects as you find them.
- Enjoy rock art by viewing it, not touching it.

- **Minimize Campfire Impacts**
- Where fires are permitted, use established fire rings, fire pans, or mound fires.
- Keep fires small. Only use sticks from the ground that can be broken by hand.
- Burn all wood and coals to ash, put out campfires completely, then scatter cool ashes.
- Use a lightweight stove for cooking, and enjoy a candle lantern for light.

Watchable Wildlife

Water runs year-round in Little Dominguez Creek. Big Dominguez Creek is dry only during periods of drought. It is highly recommended that a water filtration system be used for all drinking water.

The canyons and mesas of Dominguez Canyon WSA offer excellent hiking opportunities. Travelers in the backcountry should be aware of the high summer temperatures, the biting gnats (early June through mid August), and the danger of summer thunderstorms creating flash floods.

Backcountry Travel

- **Respect Wildlife**
- Never feed wild animals.
- Control pets at all times.
- Observe wildlife from a distance. Do not follow or approach them.
- Avoid wildlife during sensitive times: mating, nesting, raising young, or winter.

Be Considerate of Other Visitors

Desert bighorn sheep have been successfully re-introduced into Dominguez Canyon. It is common for visitors to see the sheep grazing on the slopes below the cliffs. The sheep will tolerate our presence; however, hiking off trails around the dog near the sheep is discouraged. **Please control your dog at all times.** February through April is lambing season for the sheep; **do not** approach sheep during these months.

Other wildlife species to watch for include:

Birds: peregrine falcon, golden eagle, canyon wren, great-horned owl, and pinyon jay. **Mammals:** gray fox, raccoon, ringtail, golden-mantled squirrel, mountain lion, coyote, black bear, and mule deer. **Reptiles:** collared lizard, eastern fence lizard, side-blotched lizard, horned lizard, and bull snake. Watch out for rattlesnakes!

Those Who Came Before

For thousands of years Native Americans used these canyons for shelter, hunting, and as a travel corridor from the river valley to the high country of the Uncompahgre Plateau. As you walk the canyon trails you may see bits and pieces of Native American cultures – a chip of rock, a stone tool, or a battered cobble. Early miners and settlers followed, leaving their mark in the canyon as well. Today’s visitors may discover a rock-walled shelter, or an old can or bottle fragment. Enjoy looking, but **please leave artifacts where you find them** so others can enjoy this glimpse of the canyon’s historical significance.

The most popular archaeological sites in the canyon are the rock art sites, located on the main trail, that tell the story of those who came to this spectacular canyon before us. The oldest are very faint and may be over 2,000 years old,



Life Estate Lease

The Dominguez Canyon WSA is home to an individual who was granted a life estate lease upon selling his property in Little Dominguez Canyon to the BLM in 1988. Until his death, he has legal use of the lands in his lease, as well as motorized access to these lands on the existing road into the WSA. The trail passes near his home as it travels through Little Dominguez Canyon. Please respect his rights and privacy and remain on the trail.

For more information, please contact:

Bureau of Land Management
www.blm.gov/co

Grand Junction Field Office
2815 H. Road
Grand Junction, CO 81506
970-244-3000

or

Uncompahgre Field Office
2505 S. Townsend Avenue
Montrose, CO 81401
970-240-5300

Dominguez Canyon Wilderness Study Area Access Points

Dominguez Campground:

- Two-wheel drive access when roads are dry. Not recommended when roads are wet.
- Recommend high-clearance vehicles.
- Not recommended for trailers or recreational vehicles.

Cactus Park Trailhead:

- Two-wheel drive access when roads are dry. Not recommended when roads are wet.
- Recommend high-clearance vehicles.
- Cactus Park Trail not recommended for horseback use.

Bridgeport Trailhead:

- Two-wheel drive access on an improved road.
- The public bridge that crosses the Gunnison River near the trailhead is open to hiking and horseback use.
- Public access to the WSA is also available by floating down the Gunnison River. Contact the BLM in Grand Junction or Montrose for more information.

McCarthy Trailhead:

- Two-wheel drive access on an improved road.

Upper McCarthy and Gunnison Pack Access:

- Recommend high-clearance four-wheel drive vehicle when roads are dry. Not recommended when roads are wet.
- Recommend using Escalante Forks USGS 7.5' quad map for navigation.

Upper Bar X Access:

- Recommend high-clearance four-wheel drive vehicle when roads are dry. Not recommended when roads are wet.
- Recommend using Escalante Forks USGS 7.5' quad map for navigation.

Black Point Trailhead:

- Recommend high-clearance four-wheel drive vehicle when roads are dry. Not recommended when roads are wet.
- Recommend using Keith Creek USGS 7.5' quad map for navigation.

Key to Recreation Symbols

	Trailhead		Restrooms
	Campground		Boat Launch
	Picnic Area		Horseback
	Hiking		Primitive Camping
			No Facilities

